

Message Text

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SUBJ: MALTESE LABOR PARTY ELECTS TWO DEPUTY LEADERS

REF: VALLETTA 1220 (NOTAL), 1206,

1. ON DECEMBER 17, AN EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE MALTA LABOR PARTY ELECTED TWO NEW DEPUTY LEADERS TO REPLACE THE FORMER DEPUTY LEADER, DR. ANTON BUTTIGIEG, WHO RESIGNED IN OCTOBER TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR HIS EXPECTED ACCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY WHEN SIR ANTHONY MAMO RETIRES ON DECEMBER 25. AS DR. BUTTIGIEG HAD SERVED AS DEPUTY LEADER FOR 21 YEARS, HIS REPLACEMENT RESULTS IN THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE LABOR PARTY HIERARCHY SINCE DOM MINTOFF TOOK OVER THE PARTY LEADERSHIP IN 1949.

2. AT MINTOFF'S REQUEST, THE GENERAL CONFERENCE DECIDED ON THIS OCCASION TO ELECT TWO DEPUTY LEADERS, ONE FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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"GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS" AND THE OTHER FOR "PARTY AFFAIRS". MINTOFF SUGGESTED THIS LARGELY TO BALANCE THE TWO MAJOR SOURCES OF HIS POLITICAL SUPPORT: (1) THE LABOR PARLIAMENTARIANS, TOGETHER WITH THEIR VARIOUS ASSISTANTS AND PERSONAL FOLLOWERS; AND (2) THE NUMEROUS PARTY CLUBS AND ORGANIZATIONS HEADQUARTERED IN

THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE ELECTION DID NOT PRODUCE A DEPUTY LEADER FROM THE RANKS OF THE GENERAL WORKERS UNION, AS HAD BEEN PREDICTED EARLIER, BUT RATHER RESULTED IN THE SELECTION OF A PARLIAMENTARIAN FOR EACH POSITION.

3. THE NEW DEPUTY LEADER FOR GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS IS DR. JOSEPH CASSAR, A LAWYER, AGE 59, CURRENTLY MINISTER OF JUSTICE, LAND, HOUSING AND PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS IN MINTOFF'S CABINET. DR. CASSAR SERVED IN PARLIAMENT FROM 1947 TO 1958 AND, AFTER A NUMBER OF YEARS IN PRIVATE LEGAL PRACTICE, WAS RE-ELECTED IN 1971 AND AGAIN IN 1976. HE HAS PREVIOUSLY SERVED AS MINISTER OF LABOR AND AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION UNDER MINTOFF. HE BECAME MINISTER OF JUSTICE FOLLOWING DR. ANTON BUTTIGIEG'S RESIGNATION IN OCTOBER 1976.

4. THE NEW DEPUTY LEADER FOR PARTY AFFAIRS IS DR. JOSEPH BRINCAT, ALSO A LAWYER, AGE 32, WHO HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SINCE 1971. DR. BRINCAT SERVED IN THE CUSTOMS SERVICE AND AS A DEPUTY REGISTRAR OF THE MALTESE SUPERIOR COURTS BEFORE HIS FIRST ELECTION TO PARLIAMENT. DR. BRINCAT ALSO IS DR. ANTON BUTTIGIEG'S SON-IN-LAW, BEING MARRIED TO DR. BUTTIGIEG'S DAUGHTER, ROSE.

5. THE ELECTION OF THE TWO DEPUTY LEADERS WERE CONDUCTED BY SECRET WRITTEN BALLOT, FOLLOWING NOMINATIONS FROM THE FLOOR. DR. CASSAR WAS OPPOSED BY WISTIN ABELA, THE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT, AND BY DR. JOSEPH ABELA, THE MINISTER OF FINANCE. CASSAR RECEIVED 256 OUT OF A TOTAL OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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572 VALID VOTES, WITH 250 VOTES GOING TO WISTIN ABELA AND 66 VOTES TO JOSEPH ABELA.

6. FOR THE SECOND POSITION, DR. BRINCAT WAS OPPOSED BY LORRY SANT, THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, AND BY DANNY CREMONA, THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, FISHERIES AND AGRICULTURE. BRINCAT RECEIVED 299 OUT OF A TOTAL OF 593 VALID VOTES, WHILE SANT HAD 171 VOTES AND CREMONA 123 VOTES.

7. AT THE CLOSE OF THE VOTING, THE TWO NEW DEPUTY LEADERS EXPRESSED THEIR LOYALTY TO PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF AND PROMISED TO "FACE THE CHALLENGE WHICH MALTA'S FUTURE OFFERS WITH COURAGE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE MALTA LABOR PARTY."

8. COMMENT: THE ELECTION OF CASSAR AND BRINCAT HAS GENERALLY BEEN WELL RECEIVED THROUGHOUT MALTA, AS MUCH AMONG OPPOSITION NATIONALIST CIRCLES AS WITHIN THE LABOR

PARTY ITSELF. THERE HAD BEEN CONSIDERABLE CONCERN THAT
DR. BUTTIGIEG MIGHT BE REPLACED BY A RADICAL HEIR
APPARENT TO MINTOFF. HOWEVER, BOTH CASSAR AND BRINCAT
ARE WELL REGARDED REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "MODERATE" WING
OF THE LABOR PARTY, WITH EXCELLENT PROFESSIONAL REPUTATIONS.
MINTOFF SAT QUIETLY DURING THE GENERAL CONFERENCE, AND HE
DID NOT OPENLY INTERVENE IN THE NOMINATING OR VOTING
PROCEDURES. THE OVERALL RESULT WOULD APPEAR TO AUGUR
WELL FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MALTA LABOR PARTY AS FAR AS
ITS IMPACT ON THE MALTESE ELECTORATE IS CONCERNED. END
COMMENT. WIGGINS

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